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# The Norton Anthology of English Literature

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SEVENTH EDITION

VOLUME 1

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W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

FROM SONGS AND SONNETS<sup>1</sup>The Flea<sup>2</sup>

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
 How little that which thou deniest me is;  
 Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,  
 And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
 5 Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
 A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,  
 Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
 And pampered swells with one blood made of two,<sup>3</sup>  
 And this, alas, is more than we would do.

10 Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
 Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
 This flea is you and I, and this  
 Our marriage bed and marriage temple is;  
 Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,  
 15 And cloistered<sup>4</sup> in these living walls of jet.<sup>o</sup>  
 Though use<sup>o</sup> make you apt to kill<sup>5</sup> me,  
 Let not to that, self-murder added be,  
 And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

black  
habit

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
 20 Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?  
 Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
 Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?  
 Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
 Find'st not thy self nor me the weaker now;  
 25 'Tis true; then learn how false fears be:  
 Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
 Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

1633

## The Good-Morrow

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I  
 Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then,  
 But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?

1. Donne's love poems were written over nearly two decades, beginning around 1595; they were not published in Donne's lifetime but circulated widely in manuscript. The title *Songs and Sonnets* was supplied in the second edition (1635), which grouped the poems by kind, but neither this arrangement nor the more haphazard organization of the first edition (1633) is Donne's own. In Donne's time the term sonnet often meant simply "love lyric," and in fact there is only one formal sonnet in this collection. For the poems we present

we follow the 1635 edition, beginning with the extremely popular poem *The Flea*.

2. This insect afforded a popular erotic theme for poets all over Europe, deriving from a pseudo-Ovidian medieval poem in which a lover envies the flea for the liberties it takes with his mistress's body.

3. The swelling suggests pregnancy.

4. As in a convent or monastery.

5. "Kill" carries an allusion to sexual intercourse.

And a braver thence will spring,  
Which is, to keep that hid.

1633

### The Sun Rising<sup>1</sup>

Busy old fool, unruly sun,  
Why dost thou thus  
Through windows and through curtains call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?  
5     Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide  
Late schoolboys and sour prentices,  
Go tell court huntsmen that the King will ride,<sup>2</sup>  
Call country ants to harvest offices;<sup>3</sup>  
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,  
10    Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong  
Why shouldst thou think?  
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,  
But that I would not lose her sight so long;  
15     If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,  
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine<sup>4</sup>  
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.  
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
20    And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She is all states,<sup>o</sup> and all princes I, *nations*  
Nothing else is.  
Princes do but play us; compared to this,  
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
25     Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,  
In that the world's contracted thus;  
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
30    This bed thy center is,<sup>5</sup> these walls thy sphere.

1633

### The Indifferent<sup>1</sup>

I can love both fair and brown,<sup>2</sup>  
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays,

1. Some lines of this poem recall Ovid, *Amores* 1.13.  
2. King James was very fond of hunting.  
3. Autumn chores. "Country ants": farm drudges.  
4. The India of "spice" is East India; that of "mine" (gold) is the West Indies.

5. According to the old Ptolemaic astronomy, the earth was the center of the sun's orbit, and the sun's motion was contained within its sphere.  
1. Some lines of this poem recall Ovid, *Amores* 2.4.  
2. Both blond and brunet.

The Bait<sup>1</sup>

Come live with me and be my love,  
 And we will some new pleasures prove,  
 Of golden sands and crystal brooks,  
 With silken lines and silver hooks.

5 There will the river whispering run,  
 Warmed by thine eyes more than the sun.  
 And there the enamored fish will stay,  
 Begging themselves they may betray.

10 When thou wilt swim in that live bath,  
 Each fish, which every channel hath,  
 Will amorously to thee swim,  
 Gladder to catch thee, than thou him.

15 If thou, to be so seen, beest loath,  
 By sun or moon, thou darkenest both;  
 And if myself have leave to see,  
 I need not their light, having thee.

20 Let others freeze with angling reeds,  
 And cut their legs with shells and weeds,  
 Or treacherously poor fish beset  
 With strangling snare or windowy net;

Let coarse bold hands from slimy nest  
 The bedded fish in banks out-wrest,  
 Or curious traitors, sleeve-silk flies,<sup>2</sup>  
 Bewitch poor fishes' wandering eyes.

25 For thee, thou needest no such deceit,  
 For thou thyself art thine own bait;  
 That fish that is not caught thereby,  
 Alas, is wiser far than I.

1633

## The Apparition

When by thy scorn, O murderess, I am dead,  
 And that thou thinkst thee free  
 From all solicitation from me,  
 Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
 5 And thee, feigned vestal,<sup>1</sup> in worse arms shall see;

1. This poem is Donne's response to Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (p. 989). Another of the many responses was Raleigh's *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd* (p. 879).

2. Flies made of unraveled silk. "Curious": exquisitely made.

1. Virgins consecrated to the Roman goddess Vesta.

Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,<sup>o</sup>  
 And he whose thou art then, being tired before,  
 Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
 Thou call'st for more,  
 10 And in false sleep will from thee shrink,  
 And then, poor aspen wretch,<sup>2</sup> neglected thou  
 Bathed in a cold quicksilver sweat<sup>3</sup> wilt lie  
 A verier<sup>o</sup> ghost than I;  
 What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
 15 Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
 I had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
 Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

flicker

truer

1633

### A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning<sup>1</sup>

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
 And whisper to their souls to go,  
 Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
 The breath goes now, and some say, No;  
 5 So let us melt, and make no noise,  
 No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
 'Twere profanation<sup>o</sup> of our joys  
 To tell the laity our love.  
 10 Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
 Men reckon what it did and meant;  
 But trepidation of the spheres,  
 Though greater far, is innocent.<sup>2</sup>  
 Dull sublunary<sup>3</sup> lovers' love  
 (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
 15 Absence, because it doth remove  
 Those things which elemented<sup>o</sup> it.  
 But we, by a love so much refined  
 That our selves know not what it is,  
 Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
 20 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

desecration

composed

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
 Though I must go, endure not yet

2. Aspen leaves flutter in the slightest breeze.

3. Sweating in terror; quicksilver (mercury) was a stock prescription for venereal disease, and sweating was part of the cure.

1. For "valediction" see p. 1244, n. 1. Izaak Walton speculated that this poem was addressed to Donne's wife on the occasion of his trip to the Continent in 1611, but there is no proof of that. Donne was, however, apprehensive about that trip; Walton also heard that, while abroad, Donne had a

startling vision of his wife holding a dead baby at about the time she gave birth to a stillborn child.

2. Earthquakes cause damage and were thought to be portentous. Trepidation (in the Ptolemaic cosmology, an oscillation of the ninth or crystalline sphere imparted to all the inner spheres), though a much more violent motion than an earthquake, is neither destructive nor sinister.

3. Beneath the moon, therefore earthly, sensual, and subject to change.

A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.  
 25 If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses<sup>4</sup> are two;  
 Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.  
 And though it in the center sit,  
 30 Yet when the other far doth roam,  
 It leans and hearkens after it,  
 And grows erect, as that comes home.  
 Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
 35 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
 And makes me end where I begun.

1633

### The Ecstasy<sup>1</sup>

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
 A pregnant bank swelled up to rest  
 The violet's reclining head,  
 Sat we two, one another's best.  
 5 Our hands were firmly cemented  
 With a fast balm<sup>o</sup> which thence did spring, *perspiration*  
 Our eye-beams<sup>2</sup> twisted, and did thread  
 Our eyes upon one double string;  
 So to intergraft our hands, as yet  
 10 Was all our means to make us one,  
 And pictures in our eyes to get<sup>o</sup> *beget*  
 Was all our propagation.<sup>3</sup>  
 As 'twixt two equal armies Fate  
 Suspends uncertain victory,  
 15 Our souls (which to advance their state  
 Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me;  
 And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
 We like sepulchral statues lay;  
 All day the same our postures were,  
 20 And we said nothing all the day.

4. The two legs of a geometer's or draughtsman's compass. This simile is the most famous example of the "metaphysical conceit" (see "Figurative language," in the "Literary Terminology" appendix to this volume).

1. From *ekstasis* (Greek), a movement of the soul

outside of the body.

2. Invisible shafts of light, thought of as going out of the eyes and thereby enabling one to see things.

3. Reflections of each in the other's eyes, often called "making babies."

If any, so by love refined  
 That he soul's language understood,  
 And by good love were grown all mind,<sup>4</sup>  
 Within convenient distance stood,

25 He (though he know not which soul spake,  
 Because both meant, both spake the same)  
 Might thence a new concoction<sup>5</sup> take,  
 And part far purer than he came.

This ecstasy doth unperplex,  
 30 We said, and tell us what we love;  
 We see by this it was not sex;  
 We see we saw not what did move;<sup>6</sup>

*motivate us*

But as all several<sup>6</sup> souls contain  
 Mixture of things, they know not what,  
 35 Love these mixed souls doth mix again,  
 And makes both one, each this and that.

*separate*

A single violet transplant,  
 The strength, the color, and the size  
 (All which before was poor and scant)  
 40 Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love with one another so  
 Interinanimates two souls,  
 That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
 Defects of loneliness controls.

45 We then, who are this new soul, know  
 Of what we are composed and made,  
 For th' atomies<sup>6</sup> of which we grow  
 Are souls, whom no change can invade.

*components*

But O alas, so long, so far  
 50 Our bodies why do we forbear?  
 They are ours, though they are not we; we are  
 The intelligences, they the sphere.<sup>6</sup>

We owe them thanks because they thus  
 Did us to us at first convey,  
 55 Yielded their forces, sense, to us,  
 Nor are dross to us, but allay.<sup>7</sup>

On man heaven's influence works not so  
 But that it first imprints the air:<sup>8</sup>

4. On this higher love, see Bembo's ladder of love from *The Courtier*, p. 579.

5. In the alchemical sense of sublimation or purification.

6. In Ptolemaic astronomy, each planet, set in a transparent "sphere" that revolved and so carried

it around the earth, was inhabited by a controlling angelic "intelligence."

7. "Dross" is an impurity that weakens metal; "allay" (alloy) strengthens it.

8. Astrological influences were thought to work on people through the medium of the surrounding air.

60 So soul into the soul may flow,  
Though it to body first repair.<sup>9</sup> *go*

As our blood labors to beget  
Spirits<sup>9</sup> as like souls as it can,  
Because such fingers need<sup>o</sup> to knit *are needed*  
That subtle knot which makes us man,

65 So must pure lovers' souls descend  
T' affections, and to faculties  
Which sense may reach and apprehend;  
Else a great prince in prison lies.

70 To our bodies turn we then, that so  
Weak men on love revealed may look;  
Love's mysteries<sup>1</sup> in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,  
Have heard this dialogue of one,<sup>2</sup>  
75 Let him still mark<sup>o</sup> us; he shall see *observe*  
Small change when we are to bodies gone.

1633

### The Funeral

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm  
Nor question much  
That subtle wreath of hair which crowns my arm;  
The mystery, the sign you must not touch,  
5 For 'tis my outward soul,  
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
Will leave this to control,  
And keep these limbs, her<sup>1</sup> provinces, from dissolution.

10 For if the sinewy thread<sup>2</sup> my brain lets fall  
Through every part  
Can tie those parts and make me one of all,  
These hairs which upward grew, and strength and art  
Have from a better brain,  
Can better do it; except<sup>o</sup> she meant that I *unless*  
15 By this should know my pain,  
As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemned to die.

Whate'er she meant by it, bury it with me,  
For since I am

9. Subtle substances thought to be produced by the blood to serve as intermediaries between body and soul.

1. The implied comparison is with God's mysteries, which are revealed and may be read in the book of Nature and the book of Scripture.

2. "Dialogue of one" because "both meant, both spake the same" (line 26).

1. The soul's, but also the mistress's (cf. "she," line 14).

2. The nervous system.



Nor let thy looks our long-hid love confess;  
 Nor praise nor dispraise me, bless nor curse  
 50 Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse  
 With midnight's startings, crying out "Oh, oh!  
 Nurse, oh my love is slain, I saw him go  
 O'er the white Alps alone; I saw him, I,  
 Assailed, fight, taken, stabbed, bleed, fall, and die."  
 55 Augur me better chance, except dread Jove  
 Think it enough for me t' have had thy love.

1635

Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed<sup>1</sup>

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,  
 Until I labor, I in labor lie.<sup>2</sup>  
 The foe oft-times, having the foe in sight,  
 Is tired with standing though he never fight.  
 5 Off with that girdle,<sup>o</sup> like heaven's zone<sup>o</sup> glistening, *belt/zodiac*  
 But a far fairer world encompassing.  
 Unpin that spangled breastplate<sup>3</sup> which you wear  
 That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.  
 Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime  
 10 Tells me from you that now it is bed-time.  
 Off with that happy busk,<sup>o</sup> which I envy, *bodice*  
 That still can be and still can stand so nigh.  
 Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals  
 As when from flowery meads th' hill's shadow steals.  
 15 Off with that wiry coronet and show  
 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow;  
 Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread  
 In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.  
 In such white robes, heaven's angels used to be  
 20 Received by men; thou, angel, bring'st with thee  
 A heaven like Mahomet's paradise;<sup>4</sup> and though  
 Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know  
 By this these angels from an evil sprite,  
 Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright.  
 25 License my roving hands, and let them go  
 Before, behind, between, above, below.  
 O my America! my new-found-land,  
 My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,  
 My mine of precious stones, my empery,<sup>o</sup> *empire*  
 30 How blest am I in this discovering thee!  
 To enter in these bonds is to be free;  
 There where my hand is set, my seal shall be.<sup>5</sup>

1. This poem reworks the central situation of Ovid's *Amores* 1.5 in much more dramatic terms.

2. Labor in the dual sense of "get to work (sexually)" and "distress."

3. The stomacher, an ornamental, often jeweled, covering for the chest, worn under the lacing of the bodice.

4. A place of sensual pleasure, thought to be populated by seductive houris for the delectation of the faithful.

5. The jokes mingle law with sex: where he has signed a document (placed his hand) he will now place his seal; and in the bonds of her arms he will find freedom.

Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee.  
 As souls unbodied, bodies unclathed must be,  
 35 To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use  
 Are like Atalanta's balls,<sup>6</sup> cast in men's views,  
 That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,  
 His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.  
 Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings, made  
 40 For laymen, are all women thus arrayed;  
 Themselves are mystic books, which only we  
 (Whom their imputed grace will dignify)  
 Must see revealed.<sup>7</sup> Then since that I may know,  
 As liberally as to a midwife show  
 45 Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,  
 Here is no penance, much less innocence.<sup>8</sup>  
 To teach thee, I am naked first; why then  
 What need'st thou have more covering than a man?

1669

**Satire 3** In satire the author holds a subject up to ridicule or to scorn. Like his elegies, Donne's five verse satires were written in his twenties and are in the forefront of an effort in the 1590s (by Donne, Ben Jonson, Joseph Hall, and John Marston) to naturalize those classical forms in England. While elements of satire figure in many different kinds of literature, the great models for formal verse satire were the Roman poets Horace and Juvenal, the former for an ubanely witty style, the latter for an indignant or angry manner. While Donne's other satires call on these models, his third satire more nearly resembles a third Roman satirist, Persius, known for an abstruse style and moralizing manner. This work is a strenuous discussion of an acute theological problem, for the age and for Donne himself: How may one discover the true Christian church among so many claimants to that role? At the time Donne wrote this, he was in the process of leaving the Roman Catholic Church of his heritage for the Church of England.

### Satire 3

Kind pity chokes my spleen;<sup>1</sup> brave scorn forbids  
 Those tears to issue which swell my eyelids;  
 I must not laugh, nor weep<sup>o</sup> sins, and be wise: *lament*  
 Can railing then cure these worn maladies?  
 5 Is not our mistress, fair Religion,  
 As worthy of all our souls' devotion  
 As virtue was to the first blinded age?<sup>2</sup>

6. Atalanta, running a race against her suitor Hippomenes, was beaten when he dropped golden balls (apples) for her to pick up. Donne reverses the story.

7. By granting favors to their lovers, women impute to them grace that they don't deserve, as God (in Calvinist doctrine) imputes grace to undeserving sinners. Laymen can only look at the covers of mystic books (women) but "we" elect can

read them.

8. Some manuscripts read: "There is no penance due to innocence." White garments would be appropriate either for the innocent virgin or for the sinner doing formal penance.

1. The seat of bile, hence scorn and ridicule.

2. The age of paganism, blind to Christianity but capable of natural morality ("virtue").